

## **Democracy in Action**

Law & Global Business Society took more than 30 students to the Viera Courthouse on December 7th. The students got an inside look at what happens in our courthouse on a daily basis with the help of Corporal Wells. As Cpl. Wells guided the students throughout the building, he explained the different levels of security and took them into the Law Library. They were shown how prisoners are transported to and from the courthouse for their hearings/trials and saw where they are held before their hearings.

Ty Berdeaux, business manager of the Viera Courthouse, worked with Ms. Valencia to arrange everything for this tour. The students observed a criminal court proceeding in Judge Atkins courtroom, viewed the holding cells and saw the different restraint methods they use. Before this observation, Judge Atkins came out of her chambers and spoke to the students about what they were going to see and provided an explanation of the legal system. She arranged for them to also talk to an attorney that was a public defender, a law clerk, two attorneys from the state attorney's office as well as her judicial assistant. The students watched as more than 15 people went in front of the judge to argue their case. There were a variety of case types heard, they observed the plea negotiations between the State Attorney and the public defender and watched as some people attempted to represent themselves. The students were amazed on how the court attempts to work with each of these defendants to help turn their lives around and to become contributing members of society. On the flip side, the students were also bewildered how some people just don't want to be helped! After the judge heard all these cases, she, again, took the time to address the students about the day's proceedings and answered many questions. Judge Atkins stressed the importance of an education and knowing their personal rights under the U.S. Constitution.

A huge thank you goes out to Ty Berdeaux, Cpl. Wells, Judge Atkins and everyone else at the courthouse who took the time to speak to our students about the legal profession and the different opportunities in the field of law.